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ABSTRACT

An analysis of the opinions of 126 Saudi Arabian and of 166 U.S. students about 6 instances of law violations indicated that the gender of the student making the moral judgment was not a dominant factor in the student's selecting consequences to be experienced by people who committed the acts represented in the 6 cases. However, there were substantial differences between Saudi Arabians and U.S. students in the consequences they would propose. The general cultural milieu of a particular society, and a variety of other factors, are apparently more influential than gender in determining the degree to which youths will propose an even-handed justice rather than a compassionate-caring consequence for the transgressor. (Author/DB)

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Male and Female Judgments of Moral Issues —Saudi Arabians and U.S. Americans

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Abstract

An analysis of opinions of 126 Saudi Arabian students and of 166 American students about six instances of law violations indicated that the gender of the student making the moral judgment was not a dominant factor in the student's selecting consequences to be experienced by people who committed the acts represented in the six cases. However, there were substantial differences between Saudi Arabians and U.S. Americans in the consequences they would propose.

Male and Female Judgments of Moral Issues —Saudi Arabians and U.S. Americans

A disagreement among researchers who study matters of moral development has focused on the question of whether men and women base their moral judgments on the same beliefs or on different beliefs. A group on one side of this question have said that men and women both use even-handed justice as the foundation for their moral opinions (Kolhberg, 1984). However, another group say men and women differ, with men using even-handed justice as their basis and women using compassionate caring (Gilligan, 1982).

One way to study the question of which of these opposing viewpoints is more likely true is to ask males and females to decide what consequences should be experienced by people who break certain laws or customs. The following pages report the results of an investigation of this sort that was carried out with 126 high-school and college students in Saudi Arabia and 163 high-school students in the United States. In both countries the students were presented the same six cases of people violating laws and were asked which of several consequences should be provided for the lawbreakers.

The results of the students' responses were then analyzed to answer two questions:

(1) To what extent did the males (Saudi Arabians and U.S. Americans combined) base their moral judgments on the principle of even-handed justice and the females (Saudi Arabians and U.S. Americans combined) base their judgments on the principle of compassionate caring?

(2) Were the Saudi Arabian and American students (males and females combined) significantly different in the bases of their moral judgments (even-handed justice versus compassionate caring)?

The results of the study are presented below in the following order: (1) the research instrument, (2) the samples of students, and (3) the survey results and their interpretation.

The Research Instrument

The research instrument consisted of a three-page printed questionnaire that began with a section of identification information for the respondent to complete (sex, age) and continued with the presentation of six cases of people violating laws. Each case consisted of a description of the law-breaking incident followed by (a) several choices of consequences that the law-breaker might experience and (b) a space in which the student was to explain why such a consequence was appropriate.

The six cases were designed to elicit responses that might reveal the extent to which students founded their judgments on even-handed justice or on compassionate caring. The description of each case included both the nature of the law that was broken and information about the law-breaker's life that conceivably could be considered extenuating circumstances that would warrant compassion for that individual. For purposes of this study, *justice* and *caring* were defined as follows:

Even-Handed Justice The highest good lies in applying moral rules (laws) equally to all people who are intellectually mature enough both to understand the rules and to recognize the consequences of abiding by or transgressing them.

Compassionate Caring The highest good lies in sympathizing with and caring for the welfare of people in need. Those who transgress the law by interfering with others' rights or privileges should be forgiven their transgressions, protected from retribution, and given a chance to make a fresh start.

These definitions were considered to be descriptions of opposite ends of a scale ranging from no deviations from the letter of the law (the even-handed-justice extreme) to a high regard for extenuating circumstances warranting compassion (the compassionate-caring extreme). In arriving at a judgment in a given case, a person either could subscribe to one of these polar positions or else could adopt some intermediate position between the two extremes.

The six cases were organized in pairs. In the first pair, both cases involved the killing of Yugoslavian prisoners by German soldiers during World War II. The main character in Case 1 was the commanding officer (a colonel) who had ordered the Yugoslavs put to death. The main character in the Case 2 was the army major who had supervised the killings. Forty years after the

war, Yugoslav agents captured the two former Nazi officers, both of whom had been living in South America,. The agents returned the two Germans to Yugoslavia to stand trial. During the years that the two Germans had been in South America, they had lived very different lives. The colonel had been law abiding, and now at age 73 was ill with a kidney disease. The major had been involved in illicit-drug trade and now at age 69 was rich and apparently in good health.

For each of these cases, students were asked to select from the following choices which consequence they considered most suitable for each of the men being tried in Yugoslavia:

_____ 1. He should be put to death, as the law provided for such crimes.

_____ 2. He should not be put to death, but should be imprisoned for the rest of his life.

_____ 3. He should be allowed to return to his home in South America.

_____ 4. Other (explain)

The two events that formed the second pair of incidents (Cases 3 and 4) were alike in the sense that each concerned a teenage youth engaged in an unlawful activity and, when apprehended, had injured the authority who caught the youth (a teacher in Case 3, a police officer in Case 4). However, the two cases were different in the sex of the main character, the nature of the specific crime being committed, and the injury inflicted on the authority figure. Case 3 involved a 14-year-old girl selling illegal drugs in school until she was caught by a teacher, and Case 4 depicted a 13-year-old boy stealing a car radio until apprehended by the police. Each case description cited conditions in the teenage lawbreaker's life that possibly would elicit compassion for the youth on the part of someone judging the case. The girl in Case 3 was from a poverty-level, one-parent home, and the boy in Case 4 had been ousted from his home by his parents for what they called his "uncontrollable behavior."

For these two cases, students were asked to select from the following similar sets of choices the consequence they considered most suitable.

Case 3:

_____1. The girl should be put in a detention facility for juveniles for at least one year, as is provided in this state for juveniles who sell drugs and who attack people with a weapon.

_____ 2. She should be allowed to return to her home and school, but only if she reports each week to a probation officer who has been appointed by the court.

_____ 3. Other (explain)

Case 4:

_____ 1. The boy should be kept for at least a year in a juvenile detention facility, as provided by the law.

_____ 2. The boy should be put in a foster home, enrolled in school, and report weekly to a probation officer.

_____ 3. Other (explain)

The two cases forming the third pair were alike in that each of the two lawbreakers was driving a car while under the influence of a drug and caused an accident that resulted in injury to others. However, in Case 5 the lawbreaker was a man who had been drinking at a bar while depressed over his recent divorce; when he started to drive home, he hit another car and injured the passengers. In Case 6 the lawbreaker was a woman who became drowsy from a medication her physician had prescribed, but, ignoring the doctor's warning, she had driven her car and hit a boy riding a bicycle.

For both of these cases, students were asked to select from the following choices which consequence they considered most suitable.

_____ 1 .The driver should be put in jail for at least a year as the law provides.

_____ 2. The driver should not be put in jail, but he should have to pay a $1,000 fine and have to pay the medical costs for those injured in the crash.

_____ 3. The driver should not be put in jail, but he should have his driver's license taken away for a year.

_____ 4. The driver should not be held responsible for the accident and therefore should go free.

_____ 5. Other (explain)

As indicated by the choices provided for the six cases, the first option in each list was assumed to represent a strict even-handed-justice consequence, whereas the remaining choices were intended to reflect various degrees of compassionate caring. To determine the extent to which this assumption would be considered valid by a group of judges, the researchers asked 16 American graduates students in the field of educational psychology to rank the options in each case from (a) the choice that most closely represented the earlier definition of even-handed justice to (b) the choice that most nearly reflected the definition of compassionate caring. The 16 judges, each working independently, agreed with the researchers' rankings of the first and last choices (with the "other" choice omitted) in between 88% and 100% of the cases. Therefore, the researchers

concluded that their assumption about the significance of the choices as related to justice/compassion decisions was acceptable.

An inspection of the patterning of the six cases shows that the first pair represented the most violent crime (killing hundreds of people), the second pair represented the next most violent (stabbing and clubbing), and the third pair —although very damaging (auto crashes)— were not intentionally violent. Furthermore, whereas the perpetrators of the crimes in the first pair were both males, in the second and third pairs there was a male lawbreaker in one case and a female in the other.

The Samples of Students

The Saudi Arabians who participated in the study included of 44 high-school students (22 males, 22 females) and 82 university students (41 males, 41 females). The U.S. American high-school sample was comprised of 166 students (97 females, 69 males). The Saudi Arabians attended school in the capital city of Riyadh. The Americans attended school in a small Southern California city. The average age of the Saudi Arabian secondary-school sample was 18 years and of the university sample 22 years. The average age of the American high-school students was 17 years. In both countries, questionnaires were completed by the students during regular class periods. The Saudi Arabian form of the questionnaire was printed in Arabic and the U.S. American form in English. In answering the questionnaires, both the Saudi Arabians and Americans marked the multiple-choice options. However, only a few Saudi Arabians wrote explanations of why they considered their choices suitable, whereas nearly all of the Americans did so. Thus, comparisons cannot be drawn between the two groups in terms of the arguments they would adduce to support their choices.

The Results and Their Interpretation

The results are reported in relation to the two questions described at the outset of this article.

Question 1. Males versus Females When the overall group of 132 males (Saudi Arabians plus Americans) is compared with the overall group of 160 females (Saudi Arabian plus American), are there significant differences between males and females in the consequences they propose in the six cases? Or, more precisely, to what extent did males appear to base their judgments on the principle of even-handed justice and females base their judgments on compassionate caring?

(Editor: Insert Table 1 about here.)

In the main, as shown in Table 1, males did not differ significantly from females in the consequences they proposed. Of the 24 options from which students could choose in the six cases, the differences between males and females in 19 of the instances were too slight to be statistically significant. In only five instances were the differences statistically significant beyond the .05 level. The first two of these five occurred in Case 1, where [A] more males (43%) than females (28%) would have the former Nazi army colonel put to death and [B] more females (37%) than males (26%) would have him imprisoned for life. The third instance appeared in Case 2, where the majority of males (57%) and females (59%) alike would put the former Nazi major to death, but a larger percent of females (38%) than males (21%) would have the major receive life imprisonment. The last two instances occurred in Case 5, where more males (33%) than females (21%) would jail the male drunk driver, and more females (45%) than males (34%) would propose some other consequence that was not in the list of choices.

The following conclusions appear to be supported by these results:

The gender of the person making the moral judgment is not the dominant factor in the individual's preferring an even-handed-justice or compassionate-caring consequence for people committing the acts represented in the six cases. Not only were most of the differences between males and females too small to be significant, but there was no overall consistent tendency for females to be more compassionate than males. It may be that more females than males subscribed to a value system that rejects capital punishment as a suitable consequence even for the crime of murder. However, such a difference, as reflected in the cases of the two Nazi officers, could be considered only a very modest tendency. As the figures in Table 1 suggest, the tendency toward preferring even-handed justice or preferring compassion varied from one case to another. In other words, particular conditions of the case at hand appeared to influence the students' decisions far more than did the students' gender.

For example, more important conditions than the gender of the student are apparently reflected in the cases of the German army officers, where a significantly larger number of both males and females would put the major to death (he was in good health and had been engaged in the illicit-drug trade) than would put the colonel to death (he was in poor health and had been a law-abiding

citizen in South America). Therefore, even though both officers had been responsible for the death over 100 Yugoslav partisans, the values that students associated with the two men's lives in South America after the war apparently caused more of them to propose a more compassionate consequence for the colonel than for the major.

When the matter of gender is being considered, it is also of interest to ask whether respondents were more lenient toward people of their own sex when proposing consequences for misdeeds. Some evidence bearing on this issue is provided by students' answers to the second and third pairs of cases. The second pair concerned the teenage girl stabbing a teacher when she was caught selling drugs (Case 3) and the teenage boy hitting a police officer when he was caught stealing a car radio (Case 4). In neither of these cases were the consequences proposed by males and females significantly different, although there was a greater tendency in Case 3 for females (66%) than for males (57%) to send the girl for a year to a detention facility rather than to allow her to return home under the supervision of a probation officer. The third pair of cases involved two drivers who caused auto accidents —the man who had been drinking liquor (Case 5) and the woman who had taken a prescription drug (Case 6). The one significant difference between male and female responses to these incidents occurred in Case 5, where more males (33%) than females (20%) would send the man to jail for a year. In summary, not only was there no evidence of respondents being more lenient with toward their own gender, but there was a slight, although hardly significant, tendency for the opposite to be true.

Question 2. Saudi Arabians versus U.S. Americans When the 126 Saudi Arabians (males and females combined) are compared with the 166 U.S. Americans (males and females combined), are there significant cross-cultural differences in the consequences proposed in the six cases? Or, more precisely, were the Saudi Arabian and American students significantly different from each other in the bases of their moral judgments (even-handed justice versus compassionate caring)?

The data in Table 2 indicate that there were substantial differences for cases 2, 3, 4, and 5.

(Editor: Insert Table 2 about here.)

For Case 2, Saudi Arabians in far larger numbers (73%) than Americans (41%) would have the German major put to death [option 1], while a significantly larger numbers of Americans (42%) than Saudi Arabians (15%) would have him imprisoned [option 2]. We would estimate that, in the

case of the major, the difference between the Saudi Arabians and Americans reflects a difference between the two societies in their views of the acceptability of capital punishment as a consequence for the combined transgressions of (a) killing the Yugoslavs in the distant past and (b) recently trafficking in illicit drugs. Islamic law forbids the use of drugs —including alcoholic beverages— that alter individuals' self control. Purveyors of such substances might therefore be expected to be subject to strong censure in traditional Islamic cultures. Furthermore, the punishment for serious crimes in Arab cultures is generally more drastic than in present-day American society.

In Case 1, while more Saudi Arabians (40%) than Americans (31%) recommended the death penalty for the German colonel, the difference was not large enough to reach even a .10 level of significance. Although the colonel and major had committed substantially the same act during the war, a significantly smaller proportion of Saudi Arabians recommended the death penalty for the colonel (40%) than for the major (73%), a difference that apparently reflects a sense of greater compassion for the colonel, who was now ill and had been living a law-abiding existence in South American, than for the major, who was in good health and had been dealing in illegal drugs.

Saudi Arabians and Americans also differed in the consequences they proposed for the girl and boy who broke the law in Cases 3 and 4. Significantly more Americans than Saudi Arabians would send both of the adolescents to a detention facility for a year [option 1], whereas more Saudi Arabians than Americans would put the girl under the supervision of a probation officer and place the boy in a foster home [option 2]. In seeking to account for this difference, we would speculate that wayward juveniles in Saudi Arabia are more often dealt with through the extended family or religious bodies than their being incarcerated in government facilities. In contrast, youths who break the law in the United States are frequently placed in public detention facilities where, in principle at least, they will receive rehabilitation counseling. It is our estimate that this difference the two societies' patterns of treatment for adolescent law breakers influenced the perceptions that the respondents in this study brought to Cases 3 and 4.

In Case 5, nearly the same proportion of Saudi Arabians (25%) and Americans (27%) would jail the drunk driver for a year [option 1]. However, substantially more Saudi Arabians (43%) than Americans (20%) would have him fined $1,000 and charged for the medical expenses of the accident victims [option 2]. On the other hand, more Americans (49%) than Saudi Arabians (28%)

would generate other kinds of consequences for the drunk driver to face. The difference between the two groups, then, was not in the number who would send the man to jail but, rather, in the nature of the alternative consequences he should face.

Conclusion

The results of this investigation suggest that, in youths' judgments of the types of moral issues represented by the six cases of law-breaking in this study, the gender of the judge is not a dominant factor in determining the nature of the consequences the law-breaker should face. Rather, a variety of other factors, including the general cultural milieu of the particular society, are apparently more influential than gender in determining the degree to which youths will propose an even-handed justice (letter of the law) rather than a compassionate-caring consequence for the transgressor.

References

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Table 1

Preferred Consequences for Law-Breakers: Males versus Females

Males n = 132 (63 Saudi Arabians, 69 U.S. Americans)
Females n = 160 (63 Saudi Arabians, 97 U.S. Americans)

Case 1	Options 1	2	3	4
SA+US Male%	43	26	22	8
SA + US Female %	28	37	20	15
Male-Fem% difference	15**	11*	2	7

Case 2	Options 1	2	3	4
SA+US Male%	57	21	9	13
SA + US Female %	59	38	1	7
Male-Fem% difference	2	17**	8	6

Case 3	Options 1	2	3
SA+US Male%	57	18	25
SA + US Female %	66	17	17
Male-Fem% difference	9	1	8

Case 4	Options 1	2	3
SA+US Male%	31	56	14
SA + US Female %	26	60	15
Male-Fem% difference	5	4	1

Case 5	Options 1	2	3	4	5
SA+US Male%	33	28	5		34
SA + US Female %	20	32	3		45
Male-Fem% difference	13*	4	2		11*

Case 6	Options 1	2	3	4	5
SA+US Male%	15	55	6		24
SA + US Female %	12	52	9		26
Male-Fem% difference	3	3	3		2

*<.05 **<.01

Table 2

Preferred Consequences for Law-Breakers: Saudi Arabians versus U. S. Americans

Saudi Arabians n = 126 (63 males, 63 females)
U. S Americans n = 166 (69 males, 97 females)

Case 1	Options 1	2	3	4
SA M-F Combined%	40	29	23	9
US M-F Combined%	31	35	19	14
SA-US% difference	9	6	4	5

Case 2	Options 1	2	3	4
	73	15	6	7
	41	42	4	12
	32†	27†	2	5

Case 3	Options 1	2	3
SA M-F Combined%	55	27	19
US M-F Combined%	68	10	22
SA-US% difference	13*	17†	3

Case 4	Options 1	2	3
	13	79	8
	40	41	20
	27†	38†	12†

Case 5	Options 1	2	3	4	5
SA M-F Combined%	25	43	5		28
US M-F Combined%	27	20	3		49
SA-US% difference	2	23†	2		21†

Case 6	Options 1	2	3	4	5
SA M-F Combined%	12	56	12		20
US M-F Combined%	15	52	4		30
SA-US% difference	3	4	8		10

*<.05 **<.01 †<.001

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